

## PATAÑJALI' S YAMA IN MODERN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

'Yama' is the first limb in the scheme of Eight limbs of Yoga of Patañjali. Though yama simply means 'restraint' but the components constituting Yama according to Patañjali has broadened the concept and scope of Yama. In the modern times, the practice of yama may seem to be difficult but the components of yama require to be reinterpreted and its true import require to be understood for the sake of its practice without violating the spirit of yama as presented by Patañjali. The present article is an effort in this direction.

**Key words :** Yama, ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacarya, aparigraha

### Introduction

Yoga was available in scattered form even in Vedic Literature but credit of presenting Yoga in a systematic manner goes to Patañjali. One working in the field of Yoga will ever remain indebted to his Yoga Sutra of just 196 aphorisms or Sutras divided into four chapters viz. Samādhi Pāda, Sādhana Pāda, Vibhūti Pāda and Kaivalya Pāda. It is also accepted as one of the six orthodox systems of Indian Philosophies.

Patañjali' s system of yoga is popularly known as Aṣṭāṅga Yoga or Eight Limbed Yoga. People by mistake understand it as eight steps of Yoga. Actually speaking they are not the steps rather than they are limbs and each limb is important in its own turn. Aṣṭāṅga Yoga consists in Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna and Samādhi. Yama is first of the eight limbs of Pātañjala Yoga. Yamas are -

1. **Ahimsā** (Non Injury),
2. **Satya** ( Truthfulness),
3. **Asteya** (Non-stealing),
4. **Brahmacarya** ( Celibacy) and
5. **Aparigraha** (Non possessiveness).

Yama grammatically means control over senses 'Yama saṃyamane' but considering the five components of yamas mentioned by Patañjali, it is also said to be the code of conduct for inter

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personal relationship. However, its social impact is only a by product of its practice from strict Yoga point of view. *Yama* can also be interpreted as discipline or code of 'attitude' or 'behavior'. A particular attitude can be expressed as discipline, which in turn influences behavior. These *Yamas* actually purify the mind by removing negative ideas or behaviors and culturing oneself towards positive ideas or behaviors.

*Yamas* are available in Jainism as *Pañca Mahāvratā* and in Buddhism it is available as *Pañca Śīlā*. They are the group of injunctions presented in the form of Do's and Don'ts. e.g. *Ahiṃsā*, *Asteya* and *Aparigraha* are Don'ts whereas *Satya* and *Brahmacarya* are only seemingly of the nature of Do's whereas they are also don'ts. Thus all the instructions are of the nature of don'ts. We are required to find out Do's i.e. exactly what we are supposed to do.

### **Anti Yama**

Patañjali was aware that we are fundamentally under the grip of **Anti Yamas** or *vitarkas*. Anti Yama means opposite of *Yamas*, e.g. *Himsā* is the anti yama of *Ahiṃsā* and *Asatya* is the anti yama of *Satya* and so on. A casual approach towards following of *Yama* will not be sufficient. We are required to be always mindful and ever watchful.

**Anti Yamas** are performed by oneself or getting it performed by others or even supporting the act done by others. We do so because of anger, greed or infatuation. However, our involvement in the performance of anti *yama* can be mild or less intense or more intense. But these involvements usually are painful and leading to ignorance and unending consequences. We have to understand this functioning of mind and skillfully curb ourselves from the grip of anti *yamas*.

Let us try to understand each of the five *Yamas* :

### ***Ahiṃsā* (Non Injury)**

*Ahiṃsā* means do not kill or injure. We are expected to follow *Ahiṃsā* not only because other will be harmed but it is required because any such act has adverse effect on mind and it generates tension. Truly speaking injuring others is the result of anger and anger first of all takes away the balance of mind. In this way the practice of *Ahiṃsā* not only involves the physical aspect but also the mental aspect. Therefore, *Ahiṃsā* should be practiced at all the three levels – Physical, Mental and Speech.

*Ahiṃsā* is negative injunction i.e. 'do not do'. But question remains 'what to do'. If any affirmative word which can replace *Ahiṃsā* is 'Love' and 'Compassion', for all. And the most

famous propagator of this Love and Compassion was 'Buddha' and 'Mahavira' in India and 'Jesus Christ' in the west. Actually *Ahiṃsā* or Love is the first lesson of any religion or dharma, philosophy and ethics. It forms the first step towards Yoga also.

There is no measuring rod as to how much we have practiced *Ahiṃsā* but undoubtedly Patañjali has indicated the final state of its mastery over it. "*Ahiṃsā pratiṣṭhāyām tatsannidhau vairatyāgah*" i.e. as a result of mastery over *Ahiṃsā*, any person, coming in contact with such person who has attained it, will loose enmity in himself.

It is said that a man is judged by the company he keeps. It suggests that our behavior is highly influenced by the company we keep. It is said 'keep good company'. A good person or bad person always discharges an electrical wave around himself. And if these waves are stronger than your's one, undoubtedly you are bound to be influenced by his waves. Perhaps, that is why it is said, "even for small moment of time, if you are in the vicinity of a good person, it has the potentiality to make you free from sins".

Thus, message of *Ahiṃsā* can best be followed by cultivating a nature of love and compassion for every body and keeping good company.

### **Satya (Truthfulness)**

Speak truth and never lie. Enumeration of truth after non injury suggests that 'such truth which is full of *Himṣā* or injury should be avoided' and undoubtedly *Patañjali* would not have supported such truth. Perhaps the Sanskrit quote conveys this very idea "*satyaṃ brūyāt, priyaṃ brūyā, na brūyāt satyam-apriyam*".

In the above quote the word '*priya*' is very important. *Satya* is that which is true but at the same time also sweet and agreeable to the listener or at least listener is not offended. According to me, *priya* should mean not exactly the agreeable but full of welfare for others. Thus the quote will have the meaning 'speak truth which is full of welfare for others. Do not speak such truth which is not containing welfare message'.

### **'satyaṃ brūyāt śubhaṃ brūyāt na brūyāt satyam - aśubham'**

According to *Patañjali* the mastery over truth is indicated by the fact that his speech is followed by the action i.e. whatever such a person utters becomes true. In the Indian perspective we have the example that the boon or curse uttered by great sages and *Munis* was definitely becoming true. It can be said that they were great practitioners of *Satya*.

Speaking truth is also associated with our age old belief that Goddess *Sarasvati* / Minerva reside at the tip of the tongue and tongue is the main organ of speech. It is believed that whatever we speak, good or bad, gets offered directly to the Goddess. Therefore, we must cultivate a habit of speaking good or containing welfare. Whenever, we get up in the morning, we say '*Suprahāta*' 'Good Morning' to others or while seeing any person off, we say 'Wish you best of journey' or at other occasion 'Best of luck'. These are all welfare words which can be said to be the first step towards "**TRUTH**"

### **Asteya (Non Stealing)**

*Asteya* means non-stealing or absence of the feeling of theft. Let us try to understand the reason behind the action of theft by the individual? Dissatisfaction in one's own achievements and possessions and desire for getting such thing which one can't get through fair means, is the main reason behind the activity like theft. If you do not have longing for such thing which you do not afford to obtain through fair means, then observance of 'non theft' becomes very easy. Actually object attained through one's own fair means gives a celestial pleasure which can not be attained through the object obtained by way of unfair means.

The best method to observe this yama is to develop a feeling of contentment towards one's possession and develop a habit of obtaining an object through one's own capacity, earning and fair means. After the development of this attitude only, *ASTEYA* will be established.

Sage Patañjali writes "as a result of the establishment of *Asteya*, the person becomes the possessor of all sorts of gems. I believe, all sorts of gems here refer to best among Gems. According to Indian thought, *Santoṣa* or contentment is considered to be the best of all gems. Following Hindi couplet very nicely brings out this concept-

*godhana gajadhana vājīdhana aura ratan dhana khān /  
jaba āve santoṣa dhana, saba dhana dhūri samāna. //*

*i.e. one who has attained the jewel or gem like contentment, for him all other gems or properties, like cows, elephants or horses, are useless like dust.*

### **Brahmacarya (Celibacy)**

Generally *Brahmacarya* is considered as first stage of life out of four stages of life according to Indian Thought. When *Patañjali* mentions it under *Yama*, undoubtedly it is not taken as first stage of life. Traditionally, *Brahmacarya* means involved in - study, spiritual practice, performance

of sacrifices and remaining pure like that of a concept of Brahman. It also includes the concept of much disciplined life like that of a student. It is difficult to trace as to when and how this word became identified with the limited meaning mentioned above.

As the second stage of life, we find the mention of **Gṛhastha**. This means household stage of life. I believe, as against *Gṛhastha*, which permits house hold life and so also permission for sex with one's own wife, this *Brahmacarya* was considered as life without any type of contact with opposite sex or abstinence from sex.

In India *Brahmacarya Ashram* is not essentially succeeded by *Gṛhastha Āshram* and those who do not wish to adopt household life directly proceed to *Sannyāsa* without undergoing *Gṛhastha* and *Vānaprastha*. However, initiation into *Sannyāsa* from *Brahmacāri* is decided and given by only a competent *guru*. And such *Brahmacāri* is expected not only to abstain from sex but also to lead a very disciplined life. This may be understood as life for the conservation of energy.

*Brahmacarya* also means following the true nature of *Brahman*. *Swāmi Vivekānanda* writes "A person, who wants to be a perfect yogī, must give up the sex idea. The soul has no sex; why should it degrade itself with sex ideas ? (Rāj-Yoga; Swami Vivekananda; Pub. Swami Ananyananda, President, Advaita Asharama, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas; 1982; Page 205).

Sage *Patañjali* writes "**By the establishment of Brahmacarya, there is conservation of energy**". The word used for energy is '*vīrya*'. The other meaning of '*vīrya*' in English is 'Semen'. Thus people say *vīrya lābha* should mean conservation of semen. This has led us towards the meaning of abstinence from sex. But actually it denotes conservation of energy.

Energy can be conserved by consuming energy judiciously. That is why *Brahmacarya* has been described by *Vasiṣṭha* for *Gṛhastha* also as indulging in sex with one's own wife after the proper interval of menstrual period (*Vasiṣṭha Saṃhitā; Kaivalyadhama S. M. Y. M. Samiti, Lonavla; March 2005; I / 43 - 45*) . Serving the Guru regularly is also considered to be *Brahmacarya*.

### **Aparigraha (Non Possessiveness)**

Possessiveness is a natural attitude of human being. And attainment of Non possessiveness is not so easy but at the same time it is also true that if we are a little conscious, we can make ourselves able to follow it, may be on humble level.

We have infatuation towards our own life because of *Abhiniveśa* (love for life or fear from

death) form of inborn pain (*Kleśa*) which is full of Avidyā is always with us. Love for life gives rise to the love for all those objects which one feels to be useful in life. Love for such objects which are useful for life has reached to such an extent that we wish to accumulate even those objects which may not be required immediately for use but considering that it may be useful tomorrow, we try to possess it.

This infatuation is so strong that we go on accumulating even such objects which are not useful at all and we are unable to detach or discriminate ourselves from such objects. It is so subtle that we do not remain careful at all as to how we have accumulated objects around, out of which some may be very useful and yet some may not be useful at all.

One more dimension is associated with Aparigraha and that is 'not to feel pain even after loosing such object which was in your possession'. Actually speaking this is the first step towards vairāgya (detachment).

Sage Patañjali through Aparigraha has reminded us 'let us identify limitations of our requirements and needs'. No sooner we understand it, the *Aparigraha* starts from that very moment.

### ***Mahāvratā***

These *yamas* are to be practiced in the form of ***Mahāvratā*** which means there is no scope of liberality any where, at any point of time, any day and for any body. There is no holiday for these *Yamas*.

But in this materialistic world where it is very difficult to keep one's existence, we will have to find out a method to follow them on mild level. Ācārya Tulsi – a Jain Muni has suggested for 'AṆUVRATA'.

**"We can escape from speaking lie, work on non anger, possessiveness can be limited to a justified extent and can follow Brahmacharya by being devoted to one's own wife and be contented with our possession".**

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